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ABSTRACT

Designed to provide trend data about critical transitions experienced by students as they leave elementary or middle school and progress through high school and beyond, this study examines the extent of traumatic events experienced by 10th graders of various ethnic backgrounds and family types. In addition, the study demonstrates the importance of looking for similarity and heterogeneity rather than for central tendency and differences across groups. The 24,599 eighth graders surveyed in 1988 were surveyed again when possible as 10th graders in 1990, in 1992 when they were in 12th grade, again in 1994, and will be surveyed in 1996. The ethnic groups included Asian Americans, African Americans, European Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. The results of the study indicated that although relatively few 10th graders experienced any one traumatic event from 19 possible choices in a two year period from 1988 to 1990, many faced some type of experience that could be disruptive or traumatic. Few students faced the same disruptive or traumatic event. Experiencing a disruptive or traumatic event was found to be more closely related to family type than to ethnicity, partly because two of the events given as possible choices related closely to family type, and other choices were affected by a change in family status. With a few exceptions, differences across subgroups for each variable usually were not sufficient in comparison with differences within the group to say that one group was more prone to a specific event than other subgroups. A list of variables used in the study follows the results. (CK)

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Traumatic or Disruptive Experiences of Tenth Graders By Ethnicity and Family Types

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TRAUMATIC OR DISRUPTIVE EXPERIENCES OF TENTH GRADERS BY ETHNICITY AND FAMILY TYPES

PURPOSE OF THIS PRESENTATION

The purpose of this paper is threefold:

1. To share descriptive data about the extent of traumatic events as experienced by tenth graders of various ethnic backgrounds and family types.
2. To demonstrate the importance of looking for similarity and heterogeneity rather than for central tendency and differences across groups.
3. To introduce you to (or remind you) of the NELS:88 surveys as useful sources of information about teenagers and their families.

I am not interfacing the material with the literature of your field. I may not interpret the information as you would interpret it. I am a program evaluation specialist working across a variety of Cooperative Extension programs including Agriculture and Community Development. I held a contract to examine the eighth and tenth grade NELS:88 surveys for implications for Extension.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DATA

Data Source. The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) is the third in a series of longitudinal studies commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics and was conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) - A Social Science Research Center at the University of Chicago.

Purpose The NELS:88 study is designed to provide trend data about critical transitions experienced by students as they leave elementary or middle school and progress through high school and into college or their careers. Emphasis is placed on student learning, early and late predictors of dropping out, and school effects of students' access to programs and equal opportunity to learn. Underlying this study is a central theme that education in America must be understood as a lifelong process enmeshed in a complex social context. The eighth grade survey is the base year (1988) of this study. These students were surveyed in 1990 when they were tenth graders, in 1992 when they were in the twelfth grade, in 1994, and will be surveyed again in 1996.

Sample. The NELS:88 study used a two-stage stratified probability design to select a nationally representative sample of schools and students. The first stage selected 1052 participating schools from about 39,000 eligible public and private schools with eighth grades. Some schools such as overseas military schools and those operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs were excluded from the sample. The second sampling stage produced a random selection of 24,599 eighth grade students from these schools. The sample represents the estimated 3,008,080 eighth graders who were in school in 1988. Hispanic and Asian or Pacific Islander students were oversampled to provide an adequate sample size for special analysis.

Adjustment of the Sample for Tenth Grade Data Collection. The fact that the 1990 data collection had two purposes - 1) cohort, or following the eighth graders, and 2) cross-sectional, providing a valid probability sample of students enrolled in the tenth grade - resulted in changes in the sample. The sample of those for whom eighth grade data was available was reduced to 21,474 by natural means (death or leaving the United states) and subsampling in relation to schools attended. The sample was "freshened" for cross-sectional purposes by adding tenth graders from those schools attended by the eighth grade sample members. Again careful sampling procedures were used. See National Center for Educational Statistics User's Manual 1992) for details.

Sara M. Steele, Professor, Department of Continuing and Vocational Education, University of Wisonsin-Madison. Handout for Family Resiliency Conference 1994.

Nature of the Tenth Grade Sample. The resulting sample adjustment resulted in a final sample of 20,706 tenth graders (and dropouts since the eighth grade).

Racial Makeup of the Tenth Grade Sample)

Asian/Pacific Islanders	1,315
Hispanics	2,751
American Indians	274
Blacks	2,220
Whites	13,842

Weights were provided to counteract for oversampling of ethnic diverse students. In our analysis, we used the weights taking the data from the sample to projections for all tenth graders.

Eighth Grade Survey. The eighth grade survey collected information about students' backgrounds, language use, perceptions of self, plans for the future, home and school life, and school and nonschool activities. The students also completed cognitive tests on math, science, reading and social studies. In addition to the student surveys, one of the parents, up to two teachers and the school administrator were surveyed.

Tenth Grade Survey. The user manual for the tenth grade survey lists the following content categories as covered in the survey: home characteristics; family and friends; work status; opinions, attitudes and values; school atmosphere; school work; school performance; special programs; after-school activities; educational and occupational life goals. Several of the questions from the eighth grade study were repeated including those on perceptions of self. New questions were asked about use of leisure time and things that had happened in their families.

Analysis By Wisconsin Team

Purpose. The Extension NELS study is designed to communicate findings from the NELS data to Extension personnel and to identify implications for nonschool programs for younger teens, parenting programs, and programs for those interested in helping community institutions be more effective with younger teens.

Funding. Phase I of the Extension NELS study was funded under Cooperative Agreement No. 91-EXCA-2-0135 between the Cooperative Extension Service, University of Wisconsin and the Extension Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Phase II which began in 1993 is funded by the Kellogg Foundation through the Community Cares Project of the National 4-H Council and University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension. It looked at findings from 10th graders.

Method of Analysis. We ran all of the questions included in both surveys against seven variables: ethnicity, family type, socio-economic status, sex of student, region, urbanicity, and 4-H participation. We examined the range across groups for each question and each variable and identified those where there was a substantial difference (arbitrarily defined as 10 percentage points or more. We were interested in the amount of similarity and difference across groups rather than proving that one group was different than another group.

Reports. A report by Steele, Miller, Rai, Appel, and Jensen, **Getting Acquainted With U.S. Eighth Graders: Implications for Nonschool Programs**, should be available through Land Grant University Libraries. A similar report will be completed this fall.

Placing the Sample in Time. The youngsters included in this survey were born about 1974. Many of the parents spent their teen or young adult years in the 1960s.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Almost three-fourths of the tenth graders were of European American backgrounds. The percent Hispanic American was almost as great as the percent African American.

- Somewhat more than six in ten tenth graders were living with both natural or adoptive parents. Somewhat less than two in ten were only living with their mother. Very few, 3%, only lived with their father.

- Asian American eighth graders, 80%, were most likely and African American eighth graders, 37%, were least likely to be living with both original parents. The percent living with an original parent and step parent ranged from 6% of Asian American to 17% of African American tenth graders. The percent living only with their mother ranged from 2% of Asian American to 39% of African American tenth graders. However, among all family types, the largest ethnic group was European Americans. Almost three out of five of those living only with their mother were European Americans.

- Although socio-economic status is not used as a variable in this paper, it is important to note that there was a marked difference according to ethnic background. The range in percent in the lowest socio-economic status quartile was from 16% of the Asian Americans to 53% of the Hispanic Americans. The range in the highest quartile was from 7% of Native Americans to 35% of Asian Americans.

- The range in percent of family types in the lowest socio-economic status quartile was from 19% of those living with both parents to 39% of those living with someone other than either parent (mother only, 34%). The range in the highest socio-economic status quartile was from 12% of those living with someone other than a parent (mother only 14%) to 32% of those living with both parents .

- All ethnic groups were found in the three urbanicity groups. However, the range in percent living in suburban areas (metropolitan not central city was from 42% of African Americans to 60% of European Americans). The range in percent living in the central city was from 22% of European Americans and of Native Americans to 51% of African Americans. The range in percent living outside of a metropolitan area was from 5% of Asian Americans to 30% of Native Americans.

- There was considerable less variation by location of family types. The range in the percent living in the central city was from 21% of those living only with their father to 36% of those living only with their mother.

- Almost two-thirds, 62%, of the tenth graders had experienced at least one event which might be disruptive or traumatic during the previous two years. Asian American tenth graders, 57%, were least and African American tenth graders, 68%, were most likely to have experienced one of the events. The range in the percent having experienced at least one of the events was from 54% of those living with both parents to 80% of those living only with their father

- Over a fourth, 29%, of the tenth graders had had a close relative die during the previous two years. One in five had experienced moving to a new home. Almost as many, 15%, indicated that their mother had started work. One in ten indicated that a family member had become seriously ill or disabled.

  Only three events were experienced by 10% or more of the Asian American respondents as compared with five of the events being experienced by African American or Native American students. The death of a close relative and moving to a new home were among the three most frequently experienced events for all ethnic groups.

Only three of the events, death of a close relative, moving to a new home, and mother starting working were experienced by 10% or more of the tenth graders who lived with both natural or adoptive parents. These three events were also experienced by 10% or more of tenth graders in each of the other family types. However, additional events including a family member becoming ill, marriage, and divorce were experienced by 10% or more of the tenth graders living in several other family situations. An unmarried sister becoming pregnant was more than 10% among those living only with their fathers.

- For the most part, experiencing these events was fairly consistent across ethnic groups. The variation within a group was greater than the variation across groups. Eleven of the nineteen events showed a difference across the range of three percentage points or less. Those events were: father died, mother died, respondent became seriously ill, parents got married, family was homeless, father started work, mother lost her job, father lost his job, family went on, went off, or stayed on welfare. Only three of the nineteen events showed a difference of 10 or more percentage points across the range of ethnicity groups. They were: a close relative died, the family moved to a new home, an unmarried sister became pregnant. The item showing the highest range was that of a close relative dying where the range was from 18% of Asian American to 36% of African American tenth graders.

- More events showed a variation related to family type, in part because some of the events dealt directly with family type. The greatest difference, 36 and 30 percentage points, appeared in the range related to marriage and divorce. The range in relation to marriage was from 0% of those living with both parents to 36% of those living with a father and stepmother. The range in those indicating that their parents had been divorced in the last two years was from 2% of those living with both parents to 30% of those living only with their fathers. The next greatest difference (25 percentage points) appeared for the family moving to a new home. Where the range was from 14% of those living with both parents to 39% of those living with someone other than a parent.

  Only three items showed a difference of three percentage points or less: respondent becoming seriously ill, family being homeless, and the three welfare items.

Conclusions

- Although relatively few tenth graders experienced any one of the traumatic events in a two year period, many faced some type of experience which could be disruptive or traumatic. Few faced the same event.

- Experiencing a disruptive or traumatic event was was more closely related to family type than to ethnicity, part because two of the events related closely to family type, and others were affected by a change in family status.

- However, with a few exceptions, in each variable differences across subgroups was usually not sufficient in comparison with differences within the group to say that one group was more prone to a specific event than other subgroups. Traumatic experiences appear in most teenagers lives and they have to deal with them.

VARIABLES USED IN THIS PAPER

Ethnicity

Distribution of Respondents According to Ethnicity
(Weighted to Be Representative of All Tenth Graders)

European American	72%
African American	13%
Hispanic American	10%
Asian American	4%
Native American	1%

Family Type

The NELS study staff set up five family types in the 1988 data set. Unfortunately, they did not update them for the 1990. When we did our own updating we could not get completely clean categories.

Distribution of Respondents According to Family Type
(Weighted to Be Representative of All Tenth Graders)

Both parents	64%
Mother only	16%
Mother and stepfather	12%
Father and stepmother	3%
Father only	3%
Someone other than a Parent	1%

Potentially Disruptive or Traumatic Events

The 19 events did not seem to have been placed in the questionnaire in any particular order. However, in our report, we found it helpful to group them in the following clusters.

Percent of All Tenth Graders Experiencing Selected
Events in the Previous Two Years, Clustered by Type of Event

Death and Illness	
A close relative died	29%
Family member became ill	11%
Respondent became seriously ill	3%
Respondent's Father died	1%
Respondent's Mother died	1%
Family Status	
Parent got married	6%
Parents got divorced	8%
Residence	
Family moved to a new home	20%
Respondent's family was homeless	1%
Parents' Employment	
Mother started to work	15%
Father started to work	4%
Father lost his job	6%
Mother lost her job	5%
Sibling Problems	
Unmarried sister got pregnant	5%
Respondent's Sibling dropped out of school	4%
Welfare	
Family stayed on welfare	1%
Respondent's family went off welfare	1%
Respondent's family went on welfare	1%

Ethnicity and Family Types

Family Types of Ethnic Groups

	All	EuroA	AsianA	HispA	AfroA	NatA
Both parents	63%	67%	80%	64%	37%	57%
Mother and stepfather	12%	12%	5%	11%	16%	10%
Father and stepmother	3%	2%	1%	2%	1%	3%
Mother only	17%	13%	2%	12%	39%	26%
Father only	3%	3%	9%	2%	3%	2%
Someone other than either parent	2%	2%	3%	10%	4%	2%

Ethnic Groups by Family Types

	All	Both	M/Step	F/Step	Moth	Fath	Other
European American	72%	76%	72%	84%	56%	75%	59%
Asian American	3%	4%	1%	2%	2%	3%	3%
Hispanic American	10%	11%	9%	8%	12%	7%	10%
African American	12%	7%	16%	5%	28%	13%	26%
Native American	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%

Other Variables

Distribution of Ethnic Groups Types According Other Variables
Distribution of Ethnic Groups According to

	All	EuroA	AsianA	HispA	AfroA	NatA
	Socio-economic Status					
Lowest SES Quartile	25%	18%	16%	53%	41%	46%
Next to Lowest Quartile	25%	25%	21%	22%	27%	26%
Next to Highest Quartile	25%	27%	27%	15%	22%	21%
Highest SES Quartile	25%	30%	35%	10%	11%	7%
	Urbanicity					
Urban (central city)	28%	22%	40%	41%	51%	22%
Suburban (metropolitan, not cc)	56%	60%	54%	50%	42%	48%
Rural (not metropolitan)	15%	18%	5%	8%	7%	30%
	Region					
Northeast	19%	21%	17%	14%	14%	19%
North Central	25%	30%	15%	10%	14%	9%
South	36%	33%	17%	31%	64%	24%
West	20%	16%	50%	44%	7%	47%

Distribution of Family Types According Other Variables

	All	Both	M/Step	F/Step	Moth	Fath	Other
	Socio-Economic Status						
Lowest SES Quartile	25%	19%	27%	21%	34%	28%	39%
Next to Lowest Quartile	25%	24%	27%	27%	28%	23%	25%
Next to Highest Quartile	25%	26%	28%	32%	24%	24%	23%
Highest SES Quartile	25%	32%	18%	19%	14%	25%	12%
	Urbanicity						
Urban (central city)	28%	26%	28%	24%	36%	21%	23%
Suburban (metropolitan, not cc)	56%	58%	58%	62%	53%	55%	58%
Rural (not metropolitan)	15%	16%	14%	14%	12%	24%	18%
	Region						
Northeast	19%	21%	14%	13%	18%	12%	13%
North Central	25%	26%	24%	29%	23%	21%	29%
South	36%	32%	43%	33%	41%	46%	39%
West	20%	20%	18%	24%	18%	22%	19%

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FINDINGS -DATA

Any Potentially Disruptive or Traumatic Event

Ethnicity. The percents experiencing one or more traumatic event were as follows: European Americans, 61%; Asian American, 57%; Hispanic Americans, 62%; Native Americans, 63%; African American tenth graders, 68%.

Family Type. The percents experiencing one or more traumatic event were as follows: both parents, 54%; mother and stepfather, 74%; father and stepmother, 78%; mother only, 75%; father only, 80%; someone other than either parent 72%.

Most Frequently Experienced Events

Events Experienced By 10% or More of Tenth Graders According to Ethnicity

	All	EuroA	AsianA	HispA	AfroA	NatA
A Close Relative Died	29%	28%	18%	27%	36%	32%
Family Moved to a New Home	20%	19%	25%	21%	24%	14%
Mother Started to Work	15%	16%	14%	14%	10%	11%
Family Member Became Ill	11%	11%		10%	12%	15%
Unmarried Sister Got Pregnant					13%	
Parents Got Divorced						14%

Events Experienced By 10% or More of Tenth Graders According to Family Type

	All	Both	M/Step	F/Step	Moth	Fath	Other
Close Relative Died	29%	27%	32%	30%	29%	33%	27%
Family Member Became Ill	11%		13%	11%	12%		19%
Family Moved to a New Home	20%	14%	32%	34%	28%	38%	39%
Mother Started to Work	15%	15%	16%	19%	14%	11%	10%
Parents Got Divorced	8%		10%	12%	25%	30%	10%
Parent Got Married	6%		24%	36%		15%	11%
Unmarried Sister Got Pregnant	5%					16%	

FINDINGS - COMPARISON ON ETHNICITY AND FAMILY TYPE

Percent of Ethnic Groups Experiencing Selected Events

PPD = Percentage Point Difference Across Range

	All	EuroA	AsianA	HispA	AfroA	NatA	PPD
Illness or Death							
A close relative died	**29%**	**28%**	**18%**	**27%**	**36%**	**32%**	**18**
Respondent's Father died	1%	1%	1%	1%	4%	1%	3
Respondent's Mother died	1%	<1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	<1
Respondent became seriously ill	3%	2%	1%	4%	3%	4%	3
Family member became ill	11%	6%	10%	12%	11%	15%	9
Family Status							
Parents Got Married	6%	3%	6%	6%	6%	5%	3
Parents Got Divorced	8%	8%	6%	9%	9%	14%	8
Residence							
Family moved to a new home	**20%**	**19%**	**25%**	**21%**	**24%**	**14%**	**11**
Respondent's family was homeless	1%	<1%	1%	1%	<1%	2%	1
Parents' Employment							
Mother started to work	15%	16%	14%	14%	10%	11%	6
Father started to work	4%	4%	5%	5%	5%	4%	1
Mother lost her job	5%	4%	3%	6%	5%	6%	3
Father lost his job	6%	6%	6%	9%	6%	9%	3
Sibling Problems							
Unmarried sister got pregnant	**5%**	**4%**	**2%**	**5%**	**13%**	**5%**	**11**
Respondent's sibling dropped out	4%	3%	5%	6%	7%	5%	4
Welfare							
Family went on welfare	1%	1%	2%	4%	2%	2%	3
Family went off welfare	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	3%	2
Family stayed on welfare	1%	1%	4%	4%	3%	3%	3

Percent Family Types Experiencing Selected Events

PPD = Percentage Point Difference Across Range

	All	Both	M/Step	F/STep	Moth	Fath	Other	PPD
Death or Illness								
Family member became ill	**11%**	**9%**	**13%**	**11%**	**12%**	**8%**	**19%**	**11**
Close relative died	29%	27%	32%	30%	29%	33%	27%	6
Respondent's Father died	1%	0%	2%	0%	5%	1%	3%	5
Respondent's Mother died	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	7%	4%	7
Respondent became seriously ill	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%	5%	3
Family Status								
Parent Got Married	**6%**	**0%**	**24%**	**36%**	**8%**	**15%**	**11%**	**36**
Parents Got Divorced	**8%**	**2%**	**10%**	**12%**	**25%**	**30%**	**10%**	**30**
Residence								
Family moved to a new home	**20%**	**14%**	**32%**	**34%**	**28%**	**38%**	**39%**	**25**
Respondent's family was homeless	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1
Parents' Employment								
Mother started to work	15%	15%	16%	19%	14%	11%	10%	9
Father started to work	4%	3%	6%	6%	3%	10%	3%	7
Mother lost her job	**5%**	**3%**	**5%**	**5%**	**7%**	**14%**	**6%**	**11**
Father lost his job	6%	6%	9%	3%	5%	11%	5%	7
Sibling Problem								
Unmarried sister got pregnant	**5%**	**3%**	**7%**	**7%**	**6%**	**16%**	**8%**	**13**
Respondent's sibling dropped out	4%	3%	7%	6%	6%	5%	3%	4
Welfare								
Family went on welfare	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%	1%	2%	2
Family went off welfare	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1
Family stayed on welfare	1%	1%	2%	<1%	4%	1%	2%	3